

A LEGACY OF CARING

Joe Fries retires as WSTF Manager

by Cheerie R. Patneau
NASA White Sands Test Facility



Joe Fries and Bob Baker at the White Sands Space Harbor 25th Anniversary Celebration.

wstf0801-1958 Photo by Randy Page

Joe Fries at the Mars Settlement Design Competition.

wstf1002-2785 Photo by Lou Rosales

In 1999, JSC Center Director George Abbey presents the 35-year service award to Joe Fries.

wstf0499-0769 Photo by Randy Page

Mark Leifeste and Joe Fries present NASA fire truck to New Mexico State University's DABCC Fire Science Program.

wstf0802-1977 Photo by Randy Page

It is no surprise that Joseph Fries, NASA Manager of Johnson Space Center's White Sands Test Facility, has been the recipient of numerous performance, achievement and management awards during his career. It is also no secret that during his administration, the test facility received the Star for Safety from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and that the site continues to collect awards for Star of Excellence and Star Among Stars from OSHA.

But readers might be surprised to learn that he credits his wife, Sue, as the most influential person in his life, and that he cares about employees' safety at work just as he cares about his family's safety at home.

Fries, Manager of WSTF since 1998, is retiring from the Agency on July 3.

"I wouldn't be where I am today without my wife, my peers, subordinates and supervisors who have helped me a lot," said Fries. "They have made my life easier, and I've been fortunate to get a lot of recognition for what they've done."

Fries has made workplace safety a top priority during his career. The OSHA Star flag that now flies above WSTF is there largely because of his commitment to workplace safety, and to creating what he calls a "true safety culture" at the test facility. "It's a no-brainer," he said, "to think highly of the people you need to work with and treat them as family, especially when it comes to their safety."

He credits the employees with earning OSHA's Star rating, and is proud of the fact that WSTF was the first site where both civil servant and contractor teams earned Star flags from the same safety audit.

As Manager of WSTF, Fries worked long-distance to fulfill JSC goals – the facility lies near Las Cruces, N.M., nearly 800 miles from Houston. "I have enjoyed the freedom that JSC management has given me to run this facility," he said. "They basically left the decision-making up to me, to do the job that needed to be done without interference. The confidence they afforded me certainly made this an awesome assignment."

"I have worked with a super group of people who have been a pleasure to manage," he said of his employees. "They are professional and entirely focused on performing the mission we need to accomplish."

But Fries is also quick to credit his wife for her support throughout his career. "Sue created stability in my life," he said. "She brought to our marriage an understanding of the demands my career would make on our time. There were big demands, too," he said, citing the two moves between New Mexico and Houston that the couple made in 1997.

In addition to her encouragement, Sue also gave Fries "a better understanding of the education world," he said. "She is a teacher, and I have greater appreciation and have given my support to NASA education outreach because of her focus."

"I'm going to be doing a lot more fishing this summer," Fries said when asked about his retirement plans. He said he also looks forward to hunting and "spending much more time with my grandkids."

"Well, I will be doing some work," he amended. "I've been reappointed to the New Mexico Space Commission, and with the energy I have left, I will be spending time with a lot of clubs and volunteer organizations that I belong to and will continue to support."

Fries said that he expects WSTF to continue to thrive after he leaves. "We'll be growing," he said. "I hope we grow at a rate that is slow enough so we don't overextend our product quality, responsiveness and flexibility. I don't want us to grow too fast to sacrifice what we are."

Fries will be replaced by Steve Nunez, who previously served as Deputy Manager, Management Integration Office in the International Space Station Program. Nunez joined JSC in 2001 as Special Assistant to the Manager, ISS Program, and began his NASA career at Stennis Space Center in 1989.

"I'm leaving WSTF in the good hands of Steve Nunez, the NASA workforce and our contractor team," said Fries. "I believe that the site will continue to do well in the future."

Career at a Glance

- 1963** began career with NASA at the then-named Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston as a Cooperative Education Student
- 1966** graduated from the University of Houston with a Bachelor's of Science in Mathematics
- 1966** continued career with NASA in the Propulsion and Power Division, contributing to the development of the Apollo Spacecraft Propulsion systems. After the successful development of the Apollo systems, Fries was instrumental in the definition and development of the Space Shuttle orbiter propulsion systems
- 1978** transferred to the White Sands Test Facility as Operations Director responsible for the development and qualification testing of the Space Shuttle orbital maneuvering and reaction control propulsion systems
- 1990** appointed as Deputy Manager, WSTF
- 1997** selected as Deputy Director, Center Operations, JSC
- 1998** selected as Manager, WSTF

Awards

JSC Certificate of Commendation
NASA Exceptional Service Medal
NASA Outstanding Leadership Medal
Meritorious Executive Presidential Rank Award

Service

New Mexico Governor's Technical Excellence Committee
Southwest Regional Space Task Force
State of New Mexico Space Commission



Photo taken at Dale Long's retirement party.

wstf0601-1245 Photo by Lou Rosales